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ABSTRACT

This critical issues paper presents information on the young people served by the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative. It profiles the youngest students, ages 16-24, who were served by the Initiative in the program year 1987-88. Since more than 95 percent of youth enrolled in literacy classes were enrolled in Basic Education and English for Speakers of Other Languages classes, the report and all the statistics focus on the youth enrolled in these two programs. Data are presented on gender, ethnicity, entry level, prior educational experience, employment, and educational attainment patterns. Three of the largest special youth programs are described: (1) the Young Adult Learning Academy, a school developed for low level readers who often go unserved by other programs; (2) Youth Internship Program, designed to help students between the ages of 17 and 21 earn a General Educational Development degree and obtain an entry-level job; and (3) City Volunteer Corps, a local variation of a national youth service initiative. Other staff development services sponsored by the Literacy Assistance Center are outlined. A series of programmatic and systemic recommendations indicated by the student profiles are set forth. (13 references) (YLB)

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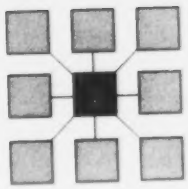

The Literacy Assistance Center, Inc.

YOUTH AND LITERACY

A CRITICAL ISSUES PAPER

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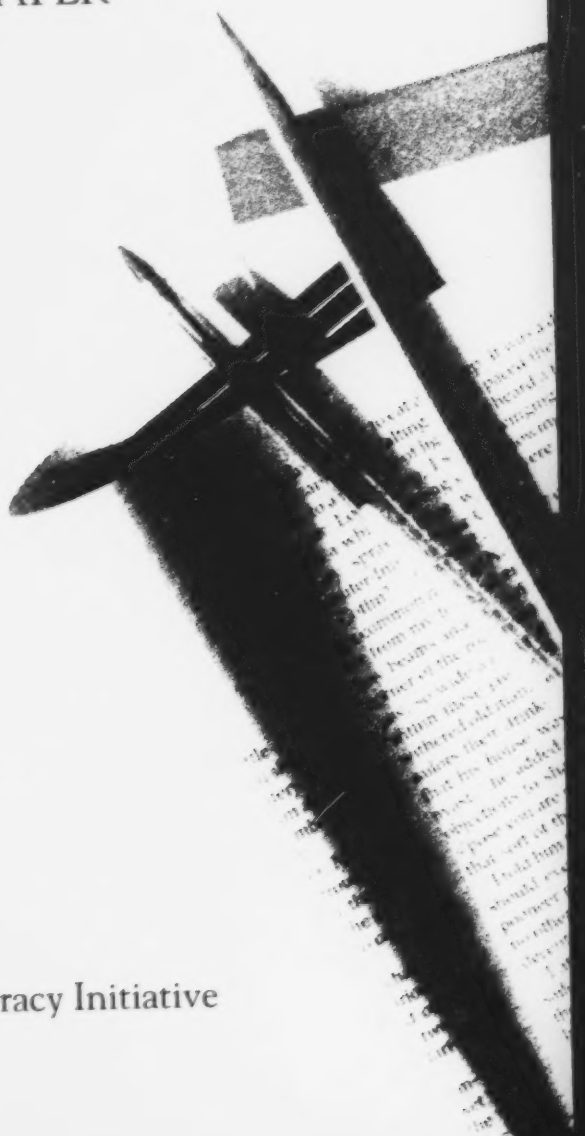

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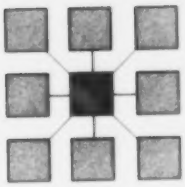

YOUTH AND LITERACY

A CRITICAL ISSUES PAPER

This report was originally prepared by Delia L. Council, formerly the Acting Executive Director of the Literacy Assistance Center. Additional substantive and editorial contributions were provided by Lori A. Diamond, Deborah Fish Ragin, Joan Manes, and Karen Pearl.

THE LITERACY ASSISTANCE CENTER, INC.
15 Dutch Street, New York, New York 10038

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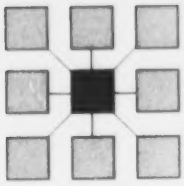

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PREFACE

This paper is the second in a series of critical issues papers prepared periodically by the Literacy Assistance Center in New York City. Each paper presents, in a brief summary manner, information on a specific aspect of adult literacy. This paper focuses on Youth and Literacy, a topic that is of national, as well as local concern.

In a report released in September of 1989 by the National Collaboration for Youth, *A Report Card on American Youth*, it was reported that "a common characteristic of at-risk youth is limited basic skills."[1] The report draws a close connection between nonfunctional literacy among youth and the problems of juvenile crime, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, and youth unemployment.

In a 1986 report by the National Assessment of Educational Progress entitled *Literacy: Profiles of America's Young Adults*, the authors indicate that while most young adults can read and understand the written or printed word at some level, only a very few young adults can operate at the more complex levels of literacy necessary in today's increasingly technological and print-orient society.[2] For many young people, particularly those who are no longer part of the public school system, improved literacy and basic skills may be critical to their effective transition to adult life in the community.

In New York City, of the approximately 45,000 adults enrolled in classes in Basic Education (BE) or English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) within the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative, approximately 8,000 are between the ages of 16 and 24. This paper examines some of the data related to the youth segment of the adult literacy population. Information is provided on the demographic profiles, program participation and employment patterns of these youth. Issues are identified and implications drawn for program and policy development.

The purpose of this paper, and of the series of critical issues papers, is to make available information which will inform and enhance understanding of the adult literacy population and some of the critical issues that arise in providing services to them. Hopefully, this information will lead to an improved service delivery system that will more effectively address the needs of adult learners in New York City.

Angela M. Covert, Ed.D.
Executive Director

June 1990

ABOUT THE NEW YORK CITY ADULT LITERACY INITIATIVE

In New York City, as in many urban areas around the country, large segments of the population have low literacy skills. Many cannot read, write, or compute at levels that enable them to perform the day-to-day tasks that are essential for functioning in our society.

Until 1984, New York City could draw upon only a relatively modest amount of federal and state funds, supplemented by a mixture of job-training, foundation, and community grants, to provide literacy training to a limited number of students. Recognizing that existing services were inadequate to meet municipal needs, the City, in late 1983, entered into an agreement with New York State and the Municipal Assistance Corporation (MAC) to commit MAC economic development funds over a four-year period to expand and upgrade New York's adult literacy programs. The agreement formed the basis of an innovative new program—the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative—jointly sponsored by the New York City Mayor's Office and the New York State Education Department (SED).

Today the Initiative is supported by a combination of direct funds from New York City, and by allocations from various state and federal sources, primarily New York State Employment Preparation Education funds and U.S. Adult Education Act funds which are overseen by SED. The Initiative serves approximately 50,000 adult learners a year (up from about 22,000 served in the year prior to its institution, with waiting lists averaging 13,000 individuals annually).

The Initiative is collaborative in its funding and program sponsorship, offering a range of services to students through a collaborative network of providers. These Literacy Provider Agencies, or LPAs, consist of the New York City Board of Education (BOE), the Community Development Agency (CDA) of the City's Human Resources Administration, the City University of New York (CUNY), and the public libraries of Brooklyn, New York, and Queens. Through these LPAs, adult learners can study at approximately 300 sites citywide—located on college campuses, in community-based organizations, public schools, and public libraries—and in a variety of settings that include classes, small groups, and individual tutorials.

Students who use the Initiative's services range in skill levels from those who do not know the alphabet or more than a few words of English to those who need only a few months of study to prepare for the General Equivalency Diploma (GED). Overall, there are five different types of instruction offered through the Initiative: Basic Education (BE) for speakers of English—generally referred to as literacy instruction—including reading, writing, and mathematics; English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)—classes which are designed to teach English language skills and which often include

speakers of several languages in one class; Basic Education in the Native Language (BENL)—classes for students who are not literate in their native language; mathematics; and preparation for the GED. Through this range of offerings, the Initiative seeks to make the diversity of opportunity the hallmark of its provision of services to the city's adults.

THE LITERACY ASSISTANCE CENTER

To facilitate implementation of the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative, the Mayor's Office, with additional support from the New York State Education Department and the private sector, established the Literacy Assistance Center. The LAC serves as a source of data collection, research, staff training, technical assistance, and referral services to the Initiative.

The Literacy Assistance Center:

- **develops and maintains citywide data on students in the Initiative;**
- **conducts research on adult literacy to inform and influence policy and practice;**
- **provides staff development services to literacy practitioners;**
- **offers, in collaboration with the LPAs, technical assistance to literacy programs;**
- **refers prospective students and volunteers to programs;**
- **maintains an instructional resources center for use by literacy professionals;**
- **disseminates information on literacy issues through the publication of a quarterly newsletter and a monthly calendar of literacy-related events and job openings, and through meetings and conferences.**

DATA SOURCES

Most of the data on students and programs presented in this issues paper and in companion papers in the series have been collected by the Literacy Assistance Center. The data come from several sources:

- First, the LAC has developed a citywide data base that contains information on the demographic characteristics and program outcomes of the individual students who participate in Initiative programs. The system also contains selected information on these programs. This data base is updated annually.
- Second, the LAC is able to supplement this information with student data presented in annual reports that are published at three levels of the Initiative: 1) reports prepared by individual programs which are then submitted to that program's Literacy Provider Agency (the Board of Education, the Community Development Agency, CUNY, or one of the three library systems); 2) reports prepared by each LPA; and 3) a final report compiled by the LAC, which provides an overview of all students and activities involved in the Initiative for a given year.

- Third, the LAC conducts selected studies on particular adult literacy issues. For example, in a longitudinal study of adult learners begun in 1988, the LAC carried out in-depth interviews, a survey of programs, and special analyses of the citywide data base to develop a better understanding of the needs of specific groups of students served by the Initiative. In addition, an ethnographic study of 32 African-American BE students was conducted in 1987 by N. Trika Smith-Burke. Also, results of a survey of staff in the Adult Literacy Initiative and an investigation of curricular practices within the Initiative were released in 1986.

Because LAC staff members routinely interact with practitioners, the LAC's research is informed by the practical insights of literacy teachers. Thus, the research designs as well as their results are enriched by the practical and valuable contributions of literacy instructors.

YOUTH AND LITERACY

There is little doubt that too many young New Yorkers are ill-prepared for the jobs the city needs to fill—and there is little doubt that unless steps are taken to solve this problem, it will only worsen. The New York City Commission on the Year 2000 reports that, by the end of this century, 90% of new jobs available in the city will require at least a high school diploma. Yet current indications suggest that many of the city's young people will not have that credential..[3] According to the New York City Board of Education, the city's high school dropout rate has been projected to be about 30%.[4] The State Education Department estimates the New York City dropout rate to be three times higher than that of the rest of the state.[5] Furthermore, in New York City, as in the nation as a whole, and particularly in its urban areas, demographic trends predict that the youth population increasingly will consist of youth at risk for poverty, low level academic achievers and high school dropouts.

With jobs becoming ever more demanding and sophisticated, large numbers of the city's youth will be unable to enter the labor market, causing bleak consequences not only for themselves but also for the overall economic health of the city. In a 1983 report on youth employment in the city, Interface (a local group that studies education and training issues) estimated that the annual cost to the city for unemployed youth is $1,000 per youth in lost tax revenues, exclusive of possible criminal justice and social service expenses. Interface also noted that if the city's youth unemployment rate were to be reduced from an estimated 40% to 22% for 16- to 19-year olds and to 9.5% for 20- and 21-year-olds, the city's coffers would benefit by $10 million a year and its economy by over $300 million a year.[6]

To many observers, the solution to this constellation of problems is to intensify efforts to ensure that young people graduate from high school. They point out that without the credential of a high school diploma, youth are at a tremendous disadvantage in the labor market.

While true, this fails to address a still more fundamental problem that characterizes many New York City youth—that is, a lack of skills. In their paper, "American Standards of Living, Family Welfare and the Basic Skills Crisis," Gordon Berlin and Andrew Sum observe that while prospective employers value attainment—the grade level a job applicant has reached in school—they also value ability—the skills the applicant brings to the job.[7] According to these authors, better skills enhance earning potential for high school dropouts as well as high school graduates. They state, "Employers discern and reward [better skills] because they [find] that workers who know more also learn more quickly and are more productive than workers who know less."[8]

Literacy—the ability to read, write, compute, and communicate at a basic level of competence—is the bedrock level of achievement the city ought to be able to secure for virtually all of its young people. Yet the evidence is that New York falls far short of this goal. A 1982 report on literacy and the city's high school-aged youth estimated that there were approximately 60,000 functionally illiterate 14- to 21-year olds in the city, youth who scored at or below the fifth-grade level on standardized tests.[9] An estimated two-thirds of these 60,000 youth had not completed high school, suggesting that while illiteracy is particularly prevalent among dropouts, it also affects a significant number of high school graduates. This report stated that although these young people comprised only 8% of the city's population of this age group, they were a "form of social dynamite whose costs—both in quality of life and in municipal dollars—can mortgage the City's future."[10]

It is youth with this basic level of skills deficiency, be they dropouts or graduates, who represent a significant portion of the population the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative seeks to help. The next section of this report presents a profile of these young people.

A PROFILE OF YOUTH IN THE NEW YORK CITY ADULT LITERACY INITIATIVE

This report describes the youngest students, ages 16-24, who were served by the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative in the program year 1987-1988. There are two closely related reasons for examining the needs, characteristics, and educational experiences of this subgroup of students. First, demographic analysis from current studies suggests that there are probably significant differences between these youth and older enrollees in literacy programs. Second, because these students face important decisions concerning work and education, the factors that seem to contribute to their success or failure in school and in the labor market are of particular policy interest.

Overall, youth 16-24 years old comprised nearly one-fifth of the 44,766 students enrolled in Initiative programs for the year 1987-88 (FY 1988). Of these, 7,978 youths (more than 95% of youth enrolled in literacy classes) were enrolled in Basic Education (BE) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes, and thus this report and all the statistics cited focus on the youth who were enrolled in these two programs.

Youth in Initiative programs in Fiscal Year 1988 were more likely to attend BE classes (56%) than ESOL classes (44%). This breakdown is in sharp contrast to that of the entire population, in which only 40% were BE students. (See Table 1.)

TABLE 1
LITERACY INITIATIVE ENROLLEES
BY PROGRAM AND AGE
FY 1988

AGE	BE	ESOL	TOTAL BE & ESOL POPULATION
16-24	4,448 (55.8%)	3,530 (44.2%)	7,978 (100%)
25 +	13,344 (36.3%)	23,444 (63.7%)	36,788 (100%)
TOTAL	17,792 (39.7%)	26,974 (60.3%)	44,766 (100%)

GENDER

The ratio of males to females among these young students, particularly among the BE students, was approximately 50/50. This near balance is in striking contrast to the ratio for older enrollees, who were predominantly female. (See Table 2.)

TABLE 2
AGE OF LITERACY INITIATIVE ENROLLEES
BY PROGRAM AND GENDER
(By % of Total)
FY 1988

AGE	BE			ESOL			TOTAL POPULATION		
	M	F	Missing*	M	F	Missing*	M	F	Missing*
16-24	48.0	50.3	1.7	43.3	54.0	2.7	45.9	51.9	2.2
25 +	34.9	62.5	2.6	34.2	62.6	3.2	34.5	62.6	2.9
TOTAL	38.2	59.5	2.3	35.4	61.5	3.1	36.5	60.7	2.8

* Data on gender not reported.

ETHNICITY

Among Initiative students of all ages, Hispanics, at 46% of the total, comprised the single largest ethnic group. In Fiscal Year 1988, Hispanics comprised the largest majority of ESOL youth (66%) and the second largest group among BE youth (30%). Blacks comprised the second largest ethnic group (37%) among youth. Blacks constituted more than half of the BE youth population (57%) but only 11% of the ESOL youth population.

TABLE 3
YOUTH IN INITIATIVE CLASSES
BY PROGRAM AND ETHNICITY
(By % of Total)
FY 1988

ETHNICITY	BE (N=4,448)	ESOL (N=3,530)	TOTAL YOUTH (N=7,978)
Black	56.8	11.4	36.7
Hispanic	30.0	65.7	45.8
Asian	2.5	11.4	6.5
White	7.7	8.5	8.0
Other/Missing	3.0	3.0	3.0
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

ENTRY LEVEL

A key question to ask about students in literacy classes is, "What was their proficiency level at the point of enrollment?" In order to assess proficiency, students entering BE classes are tested for their grade level in reading, while ESOL enrollees are given a test of English proficiency.

Table 4 presents the proficiency levels for all entering BE students in Fiscal Year 1988. It shows that, on average, youth began BE classes with stronger reading skills than older students. Over 70% of youth entered a BE class with scores on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) between 5.0 and 8.9—in other words, scores in the "medium range" of proficiency for the Initiative.

TABLE 4
ENTRY LEVEL OF BE YOUTH VS. OLDER BE STUDENTS

(By % of Total)

FY 1988

ENTRY LEVEL TABE TEST	16-24	25+	TOTAL POPULATION
0-2.9	6.7	14.2	12.6
3-4.9	16.0	22.5	21.1
5-6.9	43.0	37.3	38.5
7-8.9	27.8	21.2	22.6
9-12.9	6.5	4.8	5.2
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

Proficiency levels for ESOL students were very different. As shown in Table 5, close to two-thirds of these young people began literacy classes at the lowest level of English proficiency. This is not surprising. Many of these students were immigrants who had no formal schooling in the U.S. before their association with the Initiative. However, of the youth who attended ESOL classes in Fiscal Year 1988, nearly one out of ten attended school in the U.S. Since the New York City Board of Education cites difficulty with the English language as a significant factor in public school dropout rates, it is reasonable to hypothesize that some of these youth were unable to make progress in regular school but later turned to Initiative classes in a second attempt to improve their English skills.

ESOL youth, like all ESOL students, speak a wide range of languages. The most common is Spanish, followed by Haitian Creole. Other languages commonly spoken include Polish and Chinese.

TABLE 5

ENTRY LEVEL OF ESOL YOUTH VS. OLDER ESOL STUDENTS

(By % of Total)

FY 1988

ENTRY LEVEL JOHN TEST SCORE	16-24	25+	TOTAL POPULATION
0-20	62.6	51.0	52.3
21-40	22.2	24.2	24.0
41-60	11.5	18.1	17.4
61 & above	3.7	6.7	6.3
TOTAL	100.0	100.0	100.0

PRIOR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

Nearly three-quarters of the youth in BE and ESOL classes in Fiscal Year 1988 were between 21 and 24 years old—that is, at the upper end of the age spectrum for the Initiative's youth population. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that many of these 21- to 24-year-olds, who received some education in New York City, had been out of school for only a few years before they made the decision to enroll in literacy classes. According to the Board of Education, most dropouts leave school in the ninth or tenth grade after spending two or three years in high school and most are overage for their grade, between the ages of 17 and 19.[11] If this pattern holds true for Initiative youth, it can be concluded that a significant number of youth had not been out of school for many years when they resumed their education.

When older Initiative students who dropped out of school are asked why they left, they are most likely to cite family necessities or pregnancy. By contrast, Initiative youth are more apt to indicate an academic reason for leaving school—most commonly, having failed a class. Many BE youth cited either this experience, or a more general "lack of interest" as the factors that precipitated the departure. Since many of these young students were out of school for a relatively brief period before they returned, it would be helpful to understand more about what led to their turnaround and why they decided to re-engage themselves in educational activities. Initiative youth often say that the return to school was motivated by the need to earn a GED and/or to improve their reading, writing, and language skills, or for immigrant youth, the desire to improve their English proficiency.

EMPLOYMENT

The employment patterns of Initiative youth may yield another clue as to why they returned to school. As shown in Table 6, 42% of these young students were unemployed. Furthermore, data indicate that a sizeable number (30% of BE students and 13% of ESOL youth) were employed for some period of time prior to their enrollment, most often in construction and service jobs, but were unemployed at the point of enrollment. In some cases, these young people may have found that they lacked the skills necessary to find or keep a job which paid decent wages, and subsequently enrolled in the Initiative to become more employable.

TABLE 6
YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PATTERNS BY PROGRAM

(By % of Total)

FY 1988

	Employed		Unemployed		Unemployed & Unavailable	Missing	Total
	FT	PT	GE52[a]	LT52[b]			
BE	20.8	32.8	18.0	11.2	14.4	2.8	100.0
ESOL	49.2	9.0	14.7	12.4	12.0	2.7	100.0
TOTAL YOUTH	33.4	22.2	16.5	11.7	13.4	2.8	100.0

[a] GE52 = Unemployed for 52 weeks or more.

[b] LT52 = Unemployed for less than 52 weeks.

Among Initiative youth who hold jobs, there are differences between BE and ESOL students. BE youth are more likely to work part-time than ESOL youth. (See Table 6.) Analysis of the data from a representative sample of youth who were interviewed for a Literacy Assistance Center study indicates that over half of BE students work in clerical/sales positions and that ESOL students, who are more apt to be working full-time, are most often employed in household service occupations (30%), clerical/sales positions (20%), and benchwork (18%).[12]

Both groups of students have aspirations for upward mobility, as indicated by their reported career choices of computer and medical technology, medical services, and secretarial careers. Perhaps not surprisingly, many of the students agree that improving their literacy skills will help them achieve their job goals.

The difference in the work patterns of BE and ESOL students may be reflected in the average number of hours each group attends classes. While 49 % of BE youth attend more than 12 hours of instruction per week, 70% of ESOL students reported attending less than 7 hours of instruction per week. This may be the result of greater work demands on the part of ESOL youth. The structure of targeted youth programs which primarily serve BE students may also contribute to the hour differentials.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT PATTERNS

An examination of the educational attainment patterns of Initiative youth indicates that a variety of factors seems to be associated with their success or lack of success in these programs. One key pattern that holds true for all Initiative students, including youth, is that students with the lowest entry skills make the most rapid progress. For example, among BE youth, the highest gains for Fiscal Year 1988 were registered by students who dropped out of school before eighth grade and who entered the classes at skill levels between 0 and 4.9.

Another important finding is that Initiative youth who are unemployed make greater gains in both BE and ESOL classes than youth who are employed either full-time or part-time. For example, the average score on the TABE test for BE students who were unemployed less than 52 weeks was 10.17, and for BE students employed part-time, it was 7.44. Similar patterns were found on the John Test for ESOL youth—those who were working full- or part-time scored lower than those who were unemployed.

A third factor which appears to be correlated with students' rates of progress is the length of time spent in the programs. BE and ESOL youth who remained in Initiative classes for at least 140 hours tended to achieve more than students who stayed for fewer hours. For ESOL students, gains were greatest for those who attended the most intensive programs. For BE students, however, the weekly number of instructional hours made no discernible

difference in their rates of progress. It may be that intensive learning is more critical for success in ESOL classes, which focus on conversational skills and require an immersion that is not as necessary in BE classes, which concentrate on reading and writing.

Age does not seem to be a critical factor in acquiring literacy skills. For Fiscal Year 1988, young BE students showed no greater gains than their older counterparts. Among ESOL students, younger enrollees showed slightly higher gains than did students 25 years of age and older.

INITIATIVE PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH

When serving youth, the Initiative takes into account the diverse needs, interests, and educational and employment goals that underlie the decisions of many of these young people to seek out literacy services. To address these diverse needs, the Initiative provides a range of educational options, incorporating job training into some programs. This section provides an overview of the Initiative's special services for youth and briefly describes them.

In Fiscal Year 1988, approximately 60% of youth enrolled in Initiative literacy programs were in classes provided by the Board of Education and 20% were in classes provided by CBOs. CUNY-sponsored classes enrolled another 15% of the youth, while 5% were served through the three public libraries. The data also show that in Fiscal Year 1988, approximately 75% of the youth in Initiative programs were enrolled in literacy classes open to adults of all ages; the remaining 25% were in programs designed specifically for young people. Of these programs, one serves ESOL youth and the others serve BE youth.

The following sections briefly describe three of the largest special youth programs.

THE YOUNG ADULT LEARNING ACADEMY (YALA)

The highest concentration of youth in the Initiative is enrolled at YALA, a school that was developed for low level readers who often go unserved by other programs. About 1,000 youth participate in YALA each year, 800 at its main site on 96th Street in East Harlem, and about 200 at four community organizations to which YALA provides a teacher and educational support.

Fiscal support to YALA comes from the Mayor's Office of Education Services, the New York City Department of Employment, the New York City Board of Education, and the New York State Education Department. Recently, private foundations have helped to provide support to activities in parenting and child care. YALA is a program of the City University of New York. A policy board with representation from CUNY, the Board of Education, DOE and the Office of the Mayor provides additional guidance.

To be eligible for participation at YALA, youth must be between 16 and 24 years of age, read below the eighth grade level, have dropped out of school and meet income criteria established by the Department of Employment. Through DOE, 10 independent agencies are funded to recruit and screen youth, provide counseling and eventual job placement. The collaboration of YALA's educational program staff with these 10 on-site community organizations is one of the distinctive features of the school.

Most participants alternate between two weeks of school and two weeks at work during YALA's nine-month term. They receive a stipend of $1.00 an hour for their school time and minimum wage for their work. Students must meet academic attendance requirements to complete the program; a system of level assessments developed by teachers enables students

to mark their progress. Student accomplishments are closely monitored and reported daily on a computerized management information system developed by YALA staff.

YALA's program of classes and activities is comprehensive and tries to address the range of student interests and needs. In addition to the five pre-GED subjects (reading, writing, science, math and social studies), students may take an occupational exploration class and participate in many social and cultural activities.

YALA students average 135 hours in education and show gains of about one year in reading during their time at the program. These gains compare very well with similar programs.

YOUTH INTERNSHIP PROGRAM (YIP)

YIP is funded by the New York State Education Department and administered by the City University of New York. Located on the campus of Bronx Community College, YIP is designed to help students between the ages of 17 and 21 earn a GED and obtain an entry-level job. YIP participants receive 16 weeks of classroom training out of the 19 weeks of the program cycle. The final weeks of the program are spent at an assigned internship site.

Because of the relatively brief duration of its intensive program, YIP has been found to work most effectively with youth who enter with a minimum fifth grade reading level, and, in fact, most of its students fall into this category. Overall, the program retains about 70% of its students. Of these, about half earn their GEDs, and 60% of the program graduates are placed in jobs. If a student is not placed by the end of the training period, he or she can continue to use YIP's counseling and job services.

CITY VOLUNTEER CORPS (CVC)

CVC is a local variation of a national youth service initiative. Currently, the program enlists approximately 600 volunteers between the ages of 16 and 20 for a year of public service. During that year the volunteers receive a weekly stipend of $81, and, at program completion, they are given either a cash payment of $2,500 or a scholarship of $5,000. Working in teams of 12-15 people, the volunteers provide New Yorkers with a broad range of useful services through city agencies and not-for-profit organizations.

CVC volunteers are offered a variety of educational options—BE, ESOL, GED instruction, and college credit courses—through CUNY Prep, a special organization developed through the City University of New York to serve these students. Because they enter CVC with a range of education and skill levels, youth are not placed in instructional programs exclusively designed for CVC participants; instead, they attend classes appropriate to their

educational level at a CUNY campus near their home. However, educational activities at the campuses are supported by CVC staff members who encourage volunteers to keep a journal of their schooling experiences and offer counseling and support for them in their studies.

Outcome data for the CVC program are quite impressive. Some 85-90% of the volunteers stay in the program at least 6 months (the minimum amount of time for graduation) and 45% of the original group complete the full year. More than 70% of the volunteers earn their GED and 85% secure employment or go on to college after completing their six months to a year of service.

In addition to the three programs profiled, several other agencies that serve a high proportion of youth receive funding from the Initiative. Each year, youth programs like The Door and programs that include both youth and adults such as Henry Street Settlement House, Non-Traditional Employment for Women, and the New York City Private Industry Council respond to the request for proposals issued by the Community Development Agency (CDA) of the Human Resources Administration. Through this process, CDA selects programs for funding to provide literacy education for youth.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

In addition to funding, youth-serving agencies receive technical assistance and other staff development services from the Initiative, primarily through the Literacy Assistance Center. Currently, the LAC sponsors three major kinds of activities for these agencies:

- **Technical Assistance**. Under a grant from the Robert Bowne Foundation, the LAC provides technical assistance to either independent programs or special units housed within larger multi-service agencies to help them refine or expand their literacy services for youth. Through the Center's technical assistance, staff members of these agencies have examined ways to relate the teaching of reading and writing to the daily activities of their youth population. Staff and teachers involved in the Bowne Foundation Technical Assistance program believe that these approaches will help students to become more engaged in classroom work, especially those who cite lack of interest as their reason for having left traditional schools.
- **Youth Practitioners' Exchange**. Under the sponsorship of the Bowne Foundation and the Mayor's Office of Education Services, eight youth agencies convene in a Youth Practitioners' Exchange. This group, now in its third year, is comprised of programs that offer literacy instruction to school dropouts, conduct dropout prevention programs (often in conjunction with local schools), and offer activities such as after-school recreational services and homework help to current and former students. During meetings, the youth practitioners explore a number of topics pertaining to literacy instruction and education.
- **Staff Development Workshops**. Youth service agencies participate in regular workshops offered by the Literacy Assistance Center, that cover a wide range of topics including instruction, materials selection, program operations, and program outreach strategies.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As indicated in the profiles of students, attainment patterns and services, the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative provides important assistance to a large segment of the city's youth population. At the same time, the profiles point the way to a series of recommendations, both programmatic and systemic, for further improvements in the city's approach to youth literacy education.

PROGRAMMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Provide additional opportunities for students with low entry level skills to enter youth programs.**

  Students with low attainment upon entry register the most impressive gains, yet many youth programs hesitate to recruit students scoring below the eighth grade level. This finding suggests that the potential for success with students with low entry skills might encourage these agencies to rethink their eligibility requirements.

- **Increase the availability of youth programs that offer a comprehensive range of educational and employment services.**

  Programs that offer a comprehensive range of services, including a mix of education and employability training, appear to offer an attractive and effective program model. Efforts should be made to expand the availability of these types of programs to BE youth and to create such programs for ESOL students.

- **Increase efforts to retain students in programs.**

  Length of stay in the program is clearly an important factor in the academic success of these students. This suggests that staff of Initiative programs must continue to seek and put into practice effective methods for retaining young students in their classes.

- **Increase the availability of intensive ESOL youth programs.**

  ESOL students attending intensive programs achieve greater gains than those in less intensive classes. Therefore, efforts should be made to expand the availability of intensive ESOL programs. Since it has been noted that work needs may interfere with attendance in these programs, program planners must pay careful attention to the needs of working ESOL youth.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Increase coordination between adult literacy and youth employment and training agencies.**

  As the New York City Department of Employment institutes literacy instruction as an integral part of employment and training programs, the adult literacy community—because of its experience and expertise—should become primary providers and/or designers of those services.

- **Advise youth exiting public schools that there are other educational options available to them.**

  Public school teachers and guidance counselors should become more familiar with adult literacy programs and specialized youth programs so that they can advise students of the broad range of educational options.

- **Provide an increased focus on literacy within other youth programs (recreation, tutorial, teen pregnancy, after-school, and summer programs) as a proactive measure.**

  Linking literacy to these support services will enable youth to understand the value of learning in the context of their whole lives. This effort can be aided by technical assistance and staff development provided to these programs through the primary agencies in the New York City Adult Literacy Initiative.

- **Further study must be conducted to understand the negative impact on educational attainment that employment seems to have for youth.**

  Findings from this study could be used by literacy providers to develop innovative programs to meet the needs of youth who are studying and working concurrently.

The adult literacy community of New York City has much to offer young people who need literacy and/or English instruction. The Initiative has developed a range of techniques for responding to the needs of these youth as well as to the needs of individual literacy programs for technical assistance and staff development. Yet, as the preceding recommendations indicate, more could be done to strengthen the city's program offerings to existing students. At the same time, given the gap between the large number of youth who take part in Initiative programs and the thousands of young men and women who could take advantage of such services if they were more widely available, it is critical that over the next decade the city work to expand its literacy services to youth.

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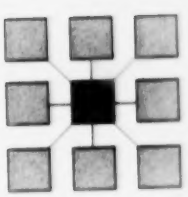

THE LITERACY ASSISTANCE CENTER, INC.
15 Dutch Street, New York, New York 10038